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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 004001

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: ABDULLAH: THIS IS AFGHANISTAN'S LAST CHANCE TO  
GET IT RIGHT

REF: KABUL 03961

Classified By: D/Political Counselor V. Alvarado; reasons (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Former presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah (reftel) shared his plans to announce his new "Compact for Reforms" movement. Abdullah's broad-based initiative will focus on common national goals, including electoral reform, good governance, and national unity, and will also serve as his opposition platform. Abdullah approved of President Obama's speech, emphasizing the need to link military and civilian efforts and to ensure Afghanistan increasingly takes the lead in determining its own destiny. While Abdullah is convinced that "this is Afghanistan's last chance to get it right," he suspects Karzai does not understand that the patience of the international community and the Afghan people is limited. End Summary.

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Compact for Reforms Movement to Serve As Opposition Platform  
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¶2. (SBU) On December 9, former presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah shared his future political ambitions with Charge Ricciardone, U.S. Assistant Secretaries of Defense Vershbow and Gregson, SRSG Kai Eide, Ambassador Wayne, and A/PolCouns Alvarado. Accompanying Abdullah were two U.S.-Afghan supporters who had worked with him in when he was Foreign Minister, Fawad Muslim, who owns a U.S.-Afghan IT company and Sameh Panah, who owns an equipment supply company. Muslim and Pana said their companies hold contracts with ISAF and DoD.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Ricciardone remarked that, although Abdullah had lost the presidential election, he had won political space and made history. Relaxed after his visit with his family in New Delhi over the Eid holiday, Abdullah appreciated the Charge's recognition and shared his plans to announce his new movement, "Compact for Reforms" (Paymaan-i-Eslaahaat), within a few weeks. He expected his movement would attract support across regional, ethnic, and political lines and focus on key areas of national interest, including electoral reform, good governance, and national unity. The movement would also serve as his opposition platform. Abdullah assured the Charge and other guests that he will present a constructive, mature opposition, which will acknowledge President Karzai when he is in the right and challenge him when he is in the wrong.

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Karzai - the Master of Spin and Manipulation  
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¶4. (S) Responding to Ricciardone's query whether Abdullah had engaged President Karzai on his cabinet selection, Abdullah said that he had no involvement in the process. However, through some of the Mujahadin "elders" Abdullah was

aware of Karzai's cabinet deliberations. He recounted that in a recent meeting with these "elders", Karzai had told them that the composition of his new cabinet had been "influenced" by U.S. and other foreign interests and that he could do nothing about it -- pointing specifically to the need to maintain security-related ministers in their current positions. Karzai also reportedly informed the elders that Secretary Clinton had pressed him to keep Energy Ministry Ismael Khan in his new administration; clearly a false assertion, opined Abdullah, but it demonstrated Karzai's ability to manipulate situations to his advantage. The Charge confirmed that Karzai's claim regarding Khan was patently false.

15. (S) Comment: Following up on the Ismael Khan issue, Ambassador Ricciardone told Palace Chief of Staff Omer Daudzai on December 10 that the Secretary of State was personally interested in the upcoming cabinet selection, and mentioned the Energy Ministry as being of particular interest. He noted that the United States was very concerned that Ismail Khan was being considered for this key position, and that President Karzai had reportedly told his allies that we wanted Khan. Daudzai denied that President Karzai had misrepresented the U.S. views on Ismail Khan, noting that to the contrary, Karzai had told them this was not an acceptable option to the United States. End Comment.

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Looking Ahead  
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16. (S) Abdullah concurred with our assessment that Karzai is  
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an agile tactician but lacks strategic depth. "He (Karzai) is an excellent actor, a master of the stage, and convinces most around him," remarked Abdullah. Abdullah cited CNN interviewer Amanpour's question to whether he wished to go down in history as a statesman, or as the man who destroyed Afghanistan. Due to Karzai's lack of vision, Abdullah feared Karzai risked ruining his own and his country's future. Karzai acts largely on his desire to manipulate, not out of conviction, added Abdullah, citing the President's penchant for spending hours ruminating over the latest perceived foreign plot against him, rather than paying attention to his ministers and the challenges they face. During Abdullah's tenure as Foreign Minister, he had repeatedly witnessed Karzai's obsession with protocol and his complete disregard for substance. Karzai had squandered numerous past opportunities to build his nation, and while he saw no indications that Karzai had changed his mentality, for the sake of Afghanistan, Abdullah was prepared to give him another chance.

17. (C) Abdullah voiced his approval of President Obama's speech, emphasizing the need to link military and civilian efforts and to ensure that Afghanistan increasingly take the lead in determining its own destiny. He stated that during the Northern Alliance's war against the Taliban, he had been frustrated because while the Afghans realized that their destiny was inextricably tied to the United States, unfortunately at that time the United States did not understand. Now that the United States appreciated this bond, the opportunity must not be wasted. Abdullah asserted that, contrary to Karzai's delusional belief that international support for Afghanistan is boundless, he was convinced that "this is Afghanistan's last chance to get it right." He outlined four factors that would largely determine Afghanistan's, and by extension, the international community's success or failure here:

--The Government of Pakistan's, and more importantly, the Pakistani military/ISI's willingness to confront Afghan Taliban harbored in Pakistan;

--The ability of the Karzai Administration to achieve

credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people, which is required to unite the country;

--The willingness of the Karzai government to work with the international community for a common purpose; and,

--The development of strong public opinion to pressure Karzai on needed reforms.

18. (C) To SRSG Eide's query regarding his views on next year's scheduled Parliamentary and District Council elections, which according to the Afghan Constitution Law should be held by the third week in May 2010, Abdullah was unequivocal that implementing needed electoral reforms trump the need to hold these elections on time. The SRSG explained that President Karzai was deliberating whether a postponement of the 2010 elections would be necessary. Complicating Eide's engagement in this issue was the fact that the UN's elections mandate had expired. President Karzai must submit a request to the United Nations for an extension, which the UN Security Council must subsequently endorse.

19. (C) Abdullah, who quipped that it would be much easier to obtain a UNSC vote than Karzai's support, promised that electoral reform will be a central feature of his new movement. The composition of the next Parliament will be a key determinant on whether or not Afghanistan will consolidate its democracy. Similarly, the selection of the new Chief of the Supreme Court (Chief Justice Abdul Salam Azimi's term will soon expire), will shape the future direction of Afghanistan's judiciary, said Abdullah.

10. (C) To Assistant Secretary Gerson's query on how the United States can most effectively work with Pakistan, Abdullah recommended our "serious engagement" both with the Government of Pakistan, and in particular, with its military/ISI. Abdullah emphasized that Pakistan must be made to understand that Al Qaeda and its allies pose not only a threat to the western world, but equally to Pakistan.  
RICCIARDONE